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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 002017

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [MOPS](#) [EAIR](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: GUATEMALA'S NO SHOOT-DOWN POLICY

Classified By: PolMil Officer Robert E. Copley for reason 1.5 (a) and (b).

1. (C) Summary: Following the April 14 downing of a civilian aircraft carrying cocaine in Honduras, we have met with senior Guatemalan military officials to confirm that the GOG has a strict policy against firing on civilian aircraft believed to be transporting narcotics and to ensure that they understand that the shootdown of drug laden civilian aircraft would not/not help the GOG get recertified as a cooperating partner on the war on drugs. Senior GOG military officials at every level assured us that the necessary safeguards are in place. End Summary.

2. (C) The April 14 shoot down by the Honduran Air Force of a civilian aircraft carrying narcotics raised our concern that, in the GOG's interest in obtaining USG counternarcotics "recertification," some in the Guatemalan military may have considered relaxing their strict rules against shooting down suspect aircraft. The Ambassador instructed MilGroup and DAO to engage the Guatemalan military at the highest levels to restate our policy against shootdowns, and to make it clear that violations of it would be devastating in the USG's evaluation of GOG counter-narcotics cooperation. Furthermore, a shootdown would lead to the immediate suspension of USG information sharing on potential narcotics flight tracks.

3. (C) The USG Military Group Commander met separately with Minister of Defense Moran, Army Chief of Staff Rios Sosa and Air Force Commander Hasse to deliver this message. The senior GOG military leaders assured us that the GOG has firm guidelines in place to ensure that a shootdown will not happen, and that they fully understood our message that a shootdown would kill rather than help "recertification" consideration.

4. (C) The DATT met with the MOD again in July to reinforce our concerns about the possibility of an "accidental" shootdown. The MOD assured DATT that strict guidelines had been issued, that in no case will the Guatemalan Air Force fire warning shots at civilian aircraft. He further indicated that the only situation in which Air Force pilots were authorized to use their weapons was in self defense after being fired upon.

HAMILTON